

Amendments to the Claims:

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application.

Listing of Claims:

1. – 9. (cancelled)

10. (original) A method of warning a following vehicle when a vehicle in front, a leading vehicle, applies its brakes, including the steps of:

causing at least one brake light of said leading vehicle to illuminate during a braking process, as a braking value of said braking process increases, in conformity with a present value of said braking value; and

causing illumination to last for a retention time that is a function of said braking process in conformity with a maximum value of said braking value after said braking value drops below said maximum value.

11. (original) A method according to claim 10, which includes the further step of causing said illumination to fade, after conclusion of said retention time, during a period of time that is a function of said braking process.

12. (original) A method according to claim 10, wherein said braking value is provided by deceleration of said vehicle.

13. (original) A method according to claim 10, wherein said at least one brake light illuminates upon activation of an ABS system in conformity with a predetermined braking value.

14. (original) A method according to claim 10, wherein said retention time is

provided by the duration between the end of said maximum braking value and the point in time at which said braking value drops to a predetermined fraction of said maximum value.

15. (original) A method according to claim 10, wherein a speed of said leading vehicle is detected at the beginning of a braking process, and duration of said fading is a function of said vehicle speed at the beginning of said braking process.

16. (original) A method according to claim 10, wherein a speed of said leading vehicle is detected at the beginning of a braking process, and illumination of said at least one brake light is a function of said vehicle speed at the beginning of said braking process.

17. (original) A method according to claim 10, wherein a duration of said fading is a function of the duration during which the braking process is effected in conformity with said maximum braking value.

18. (original) An apparatus for warning a following vehicle when a vehicle in front, a leading vehicle, applies its brakes, comprising:

for said leading vehicle, at least one brake light having a variable signal pattern;

a control device having a computer; and

means for conveying to said control device at least one present braking value that characterizes a braking process, wherein said computer calculates a control value such that said at least one brake light is caused to illuminate during a braking process, as the braking value of said braking process increases, in conformity with said

present braking value, wherein illumination lasts for a retention time that is a function of said braking process in conformity with a maximum value of said braking value after said braking value drops below said maximum value.

19. (original) An apparatus according to claim 18, wherein said illumination fades, after conclusion of said retention time, during a period of time that is a function of said braking process.

20. (original) An apparatus according to claim 18, wherein during duration of said fading the control value that determines said fading is compared with a control value that corresponds to an illumination of said at least one brake light in conformity with the respective present braking value, and wherein said present braking value is taken as a new maximum braking value if the control value that determines the fading is the same or less than the value that corresponds to the present braking value.

21. (new) A method of warning a following vehicle that a vehicle in front, a leading vehicle, has applied its brakes, the method comprising:

in connection with each respective discrete application of said brakes of said leading vehicle during a braking process that results in a deceleration of said leading vehicle:

(a) illuminating a brake light during a retention period of illumination such that said brake light displays a retention period visual format which is correspondingly indicative of the actual maximum rate of deceleration of said leading vehicle during the braking process,

(b) during a fading period of illumination that commences at the end of said

retention period of illumination, changing said retention period visual format of said brake light to a different visual format such that said brake light continues to be illuminated but has a different illuminated appearance during said fading period of illumination than its illuminated appearance during said retention period of illumination, said fading period of illumination having a prescribed blackout time at which the illumination of said brake light will cease, and

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- (c) based upon a determined time at which said leading vehicle will come to a complete stop, alternatively (1) ceasing the illumination of said brake light at said prescribed blackout time in the event that said prescribed blackout time is not earlier than said determined time at which said leading vehicle will come to a complete stop or (2) delaying the time at which the illumination of said brake light will cease to a later blackout time which is no earlier than said determined time at which said leading vehicle will come to a complete stop in the event that said prescribed blackout time is earlier than said determined time at which said leading vehicle will come to a complete stop, whereby the actual time after an application of its brakes at which said leading vehicle will come to a complete stop will vary as a function of the speed of said leading vehicle and the manner of application of its brakes and the illumination duration of said brake light of said leading vehicle varies in correspondence with the actual time for said leading vehicle to come to a complete stop to ensure that said brake light remains illuminated until said leading vehicle

comes to a complete stop.

22. (new) A method according to claim 21, wherein, in connection with each braking process, as a function of the respective actual maximum rate of deceleration of said leading vehicle during the braking process

23. (new) A method according to claim 21, wherein said retention period of illumination ends generally when the rate of deceleration of said leading vehicle decreases from said actual maximum rate of deceleration of said leading vehicle.

24. (new) A method according to claim 21, wherein said retention period ends when the instant rate of deceleration of said leading vehicle is generally one-half ($1/2$) said actual maximum rate of deceleration of said leading vehicle.
